

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: NA
TAGS: PFOR, SHUM, IR
SUBJ: PRIME MINISTER SPEAKS ON IRANIAN AMERICAN RELATIONS

1. PRIME MINISTER HOVEYDA ON FEBRUARY 15 ADDRESSED TEHRAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S CLUB (AWC) STRESSING THE THEME THAT RELATIONS BETWEEN IRAN AND THE U.S. ARE IMPORTANT TO IRAN BOTH POLITICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY. HOVEYDA'S AWC APPEARANCE, WHICH HAS BEEN AN ANNUAL EVENT FOR THE PAST FEW YEARS, WAS WELL ATTENDED BY ABOUT 1000 MEMBERS AND RECEIVED FRONT PAGE PRESS COVERAGE IN BOTH ENGLISH AND FARSI PAPERS. HOVEYDA'S REMARKS, UNEXPECTEDLY OFF-THE-CUFF SINCE HIS PREPARED TEXT HAD BEEN INADVERTENTLY LEFT BEHIND, WERE FOLLOWED BY A QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD.

2. IRAN-U.S. RELATIONS: THE PRIME MINISTER CHARACTERIZED OUR DIFFERENCES OF OPINION AS "NECESSARY AND INEVITABLE SIGNS" OF A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP. HE ADDED THAT IRAN WANTS TO CONTINUE TO SHARE MANY MUTUAL INTERESTS AND "HOPES THE U.S. WILL DO LIKEWISE".

3. HUMAN RIGHTS: HOVEYDA EMPHASIZED THAT, WHILE "FREEDOM HAS ITS LIMITS", IRAN IS "A NATION WHICH BELIEVES IN HUMAN RIGHTS. AFTER ALL, WE INVENTED IT AND WE ARE AGAINST ANY INFRINGEMENTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS." CONTINUING THIS THEME, HE SAID, "BUT IF A
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LIMITED NUMBER OF PEOPLE THINK THEY HAVE THE RIGHT TO TAKE UP MACHINE GUNS AND MURDER EITHER IRANIANS OF FOREIGNERS, THEY MUST BE PUNISHED. WE BELIEVE THAT PEOPLE WHO GUN DOWN INNOCENT CITIZENS, OR LANT BOMBS AIMED AT KILLING THE MAIMING INDISCRIMINATELY, ARE COMMON CRIMINALS AND DESERVE TO BE TREATED AS SUCH." HE ADDED THAT "PSEUDO-POLITICAL ALIBIS" COME FROM PEOPLE WHO ARE CONFUSED AND WHOSE SYMPATHIES ARE MISPLACED.

RESPONDING TO PREVIOUS ALLEGATIONS THAT IRANIAN PRISONERS HAVE BEEN TORTURED, THE PRIME MINISTER SAID, "IF WE TAKE PEOPLE TO JAIL, IT DOES NOT MEAN THEY ARE TORTURED. WE HAVE OPENED OUR JAILS TO CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE COME AND SEEN FOR THEMSELVES."

4. ARMS PURCHASES. REFERRING TO REPORTS OF OPPOSITION IN THE U.S. TO ARMS SALES TO IRAN, HOVEYDA SAID SUCH PURCHASES WERE NECESSARY FOR DEFENSE, "WE HAVE TO BE STRONG. THIS IS OUR INSURANCE FOR SURVIVAL."

5. FOLLOWING HIS REMARKS, HOVEYDA, IN A RELAXED AND WITTY MANNER, RESPONDED TO VARIOUS QUESTIONS PUT TO HIM BY THE MEMBERSHIP ON TOPICS OF THEIR MORE PERSONAL INTEREST SUCH AS GOI EXIT VISA TAX, ACCLIMATIZATION TO MODERN IRAN, RENTS AND IRANIAN DRIVERS, WHOM THE PRIME MINISTER SAID "BOOGIE-WOOGIE" THEIR WAY THROUGH TRAFFIC.

6. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT BREAK NEW GROUND, THE PRIME MINISTER DID USE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO REITERATE GOI'S VIEW ON CERTAIN BILATERAL ISSUES WHICH ARE CURRENTLY RECEIVING WIDE PUBLICITY HERE AND ABROAD WITHIN CONTEXT OF OF CONTINUATION OF STRONG IRANIAN-US TIES. HIS APPEARANCE WAS WELL RECEIVED AND WAS ANOTHER INDICATION OF HOVEYDA'S EFFECTIVENESS WITH FOREIGN LISTENERS.
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